

**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** July 28, 2004

Dear Interested Party:

### **REQUEST FOR REVIEW AND COMMENT**

Enclosed is a copy of the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project DEIS for your review and comment. The DEIS addresses the effects of implementing a hazardous fuel reduction project on up to 2500 acres on National Forest System lands outside of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness in the wildland/urban interface areas along the Main Boulder River Corridor. The project area is adjacent to the Boulder River, encompassing a distance of approximately 24 miles by ½ mile and is located approximately 30 miles southwest of Big Timber, Montana on the Big Timber Ranger District of the Gallatin National Forest. The legal description for the project is T3S R12E, T4S R 12 E, T5S R12E, and T6S R12E P.M, Sweetgrass and Park Counties, MT.

We are considering fuel management treatments from the forest boundary near the Natural Bridge and Falls, south to the Box Canyon Guard Station. Vegetation types include Douglas-fir, Engleman and white spruce, lodgepole pine, aspen, and native grasslands. All of the treatments have been designed to maintain the visual integrity of the corridor.

Collaboration with the public is an important part of this project. The proposal has been developed with input from adjacent private landowners, the local watershed association, as well as state, county, and local officials and groups.

**A field trip to the project area is scheduled for Saturday, August 14<sup>th</sup>. We encourage you to attend and give us your input. We will meet at the Big Timber Ranger District Office at 9:00 AM. Please provide your own transportation and bring a lunch. It is anticipated that this will be a full day, however, you are welcome to attend for the length of time that is convenient for you. For further details, call Bill Avey or Brent Foster at the Big Timber Ranger District Office (406-932-5155).**

This project is anticipated to take 5-7 years to complete, beginning in the winter of 2005.

The primary goals of the Proposed Action, which have formed the Purpose and Need are to:

- 1) Provide for public and firefighter safety by minimizing the probability and effects of future human-caused fire starts and/or helping to reduce the intensity of a potential wildland fire leaving the wilderness and entering the wildland/urban interface of the Main Boulder River Corridor.
- 2) Extend the potential time available for evacuation in the event of a wildfire by reducing the fire hazard along the Main Boulder Road.
- 3) Reduce fuel loadings and break up the composition of vertical and horizontal fuels in the river corridor, where possible, to be more consistent with natural pre-suppression levels.

The secondary goals are to:

- 1) Improve wildlife habitat/forage by enhancing winter range and meadows.
- 2) Rejuvenate aspen stands.

- 3) Improve fire protection in the wildland/urban interface.
- 4) Increase vigor at the stand level, in the corridor, making trees less susceptible to future insect and disease occurrences.
- 5) Encourage adjacent private property owners and local groups to implement similar hazardous fuel reduction plans, thus maximizing effectiveness by increasing the amount of contiguous acres treated.
- 6) Maintain and protect values for river segments that were identified as eligible for consideration and inclusion into the "Scenic and Recreational" classification of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

The DEIS analyzes the Proposed Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative, along with 5 other action alternatives considered but dropped from detailed analysis. Based on the analysis presented in the DEIS, the preferred alternative is Alternative B- the Proposed Action because it best meets the purpose and need for the proposal and addresses the issues considered in the analysis.

The Proposed Action would result in up to 2500 acres of fuel reduction activities. Traditional ground based methods of stand density reduction, harvesting both large and small diameter trees, would occur on approximately 1480 acres on slopes of up to 35%, with up to an additional 260 acres on slopes of 35% to 45%. Spacing of leave trees would be uneven, consisting of clumps of multistoried trees, as well as open-spaced individual trees, breaking up the continuity of the vertical and horizontal fuels. Up to an additional 360 acres of stand density and fuel reduction would occur on slopes >45% but would be limited to hand treatments.

Understory and/or pile burning would occur in conjunction with the thinning activities, with burning occurring during the spring and late fall seasons. Slashing of conifers and prescribed burning activities would occur on approximately 400 acres of meadow type areas.

Up to 9.27 miles of low-grade temporary road construction would be constructed for access to the units. All newly constructed temporary roads would be closed to the public and obliterated within one year after completion of the harvest activities.

Activities are planned to be completed using National Fire Plan appropriations, as available. There is an opportunity to implement the stewardship contracting tool as a way to use the proceeds from the commercial timber products removed to reduce the amount of appropriated dollars necessary to implement these treatments.

We invite public comments on the Main Boulder Fuels Reduction DEIS, now through the end of the comment period. Per the requirements of (36 CFR 215.5 (b))5), comments will be accepted for a period of 45 days from the date of publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register. It is anticipated the NOA will be published on July 30, 2004.

The Responsible official, Gallatin National Forest Supervisor, Rebecca Heath will consider all public comments before making a decision on the project. In submitting comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered by her in reaching a decision. Please include: (1) Your name, address, telephone number, and organization represented (if applicable); (2) title of the DEIS upon which you are commenting; and (3) specific facts or comments, with supporting reasons, that she should consider in reaching a decision. Comments are most helpful when they point out inconsistencies or errors, provide additional information pertinent to the analysis, or provide rationale for support of an alternative. Any changes to the DEIS made as a result of public comments will be available for public review

in the Final EIS. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and a Record of Decision (ROD) will document her decision. Copies of the FEIS and ROD will be mailed to those individuals or groups that comment on the DEIS as well as those requesting a copy.

Comments may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means. In order to retain your administrative appeal rights, you must provide substantive written, oral, or electronic comments during the 45-day comment period. A legal notice will be published in the newspaper of record, however, the official comment period begins on the date of publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register.

Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the 45<sup>th</sup> calendar day from publication of the NOA in the Federal Register. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the correct Responsible Official's office by the close of business on the 45<sup>th</sup> calendar day from publication of the NOA in the Federal Register.

Please address your written comments to:

Barbara Ping, Interdisciplinary Team Leader  
Main Boulder Fuels Reduction Project  
Forest Ecology Group, Bozeman Ranger District  
3710 Fallon Street, Suite C; Bozeman, MT 59718

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone or in person, or if during non-business hours, must be at an official agency function (such as a public meeting), which is designed to elicit public comment.

Business hours are Mon- Fri, 0800-1630

Electronic comments may be submitted to [comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us). Insert Main Boulder in the subject line. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed project and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217 (if applicable). Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and to whom the request may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

According to 36 CFR 215, for a person to appeal they must meet the following criteria prior to decision: 1) have submitted comments in response to a DEIS subject to review, or 2) have provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in a particular proposed action by the close of

the comment period. If you have not previously shown interest in this project, you must show interest by the end of the 45-day comment period to ensure your ability to challenge any Forest Service decisions regarding this proposal.

A complete DEIS with maps displaying the alternatives and activities proposed are also available for viewing and downloading on the Gallatin NF website at :**<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin>**.

To request an additional paper copy of the DEIS contact Barbara Ping by phone at (406) 522-2570, or by mail at Forest Ecology Group; 3710 Fallon Street, Suite C; Bozeman, MT 59718. or by email to Barbara Ping at [bping@fs.fed.us](mailto:bping@fs.fed.us). Paper copies are also available at the Big Timber Ranger District Office.

If you have additional questions regarding this project, please direct them to project leaders Barbara Ping at the above address, phone (406) 522-2570 or Brent Foster at the Big Timber District Office, phone (406-932-5155).

Sincerely,

REBECCA HEATH  
Forest Supervisor

cc. Bill Avey - Big Timber District Ranger

Enclosure